

Amendment To The Specification

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

No changes, additions or deletions

DISCUSSION OF PRIOR ART

The original paragraph of this section is unchanged:

DISCUSSION OF LIMITATIONS OF PRIOR ART

Replace all paragraphs of this section with the following paragraphs:

[0013] The following discussion presents limitations of prior art, or those aspects not covered by prior art that are addressed by the present invention. For brevity, only the most significant limitations of each category of prior art are included.

[0014 currently amended] Currently nothing is in wide use that combines detection of stressors, detection and diagnosis of damage to a conduit in progress, and prognosis of risk of conduit failure and system failure. ~~The disclosure of U.S. Pat. No. 4,988,949 by Boenning et al. is limited to detecting mechanical damage (chafing) on electrical cables against grounded structures under constant monitoring. U.S. Patent No. 4,988,949 by Boenning et al teaches detecting mechanical damage (chafing) on electrical cables (by sensing electrical erosion of a semiconductive material) against grounded structures under constant monitoring. Boenning's patent does not teach a means to perform detection and location of damage without need for end-to-end test a semiconductor detector circuit. The present invention overcomes limitations of the said Boenning patent by using light parameter measurement and does so without the need for end-to-end measurement. The present invention eliminates the need for electrical sensing which can be a safety concern, and in the preferred embodiment eliminates end-to-end tests thereby reducing cost and weight and potentially reducing the time for installation.~~ The disclosure of U.S. Pat. No. 6,265,880 by Born et al discloses use of a length of electrical conducting media (such as a wire) along the outside of a conduit to detect mechanical damage (chafing), and improves on said Boenning's patent by teaching periodic testing, and detecting chafing on conduits other than electrical cables, and detecting chafing against a non-electrically grounded structure.

[0015 currently amended] Watkins patent U.S. Pat. No. 5,862,030 teaches an electrical safety device comprised of a sensor strip disposed in the insulation of a wire or in the insulation of a sheath enclosing a bundle of electrical conductors, where the sensor strip comprises a distributed conductive over-temperature sensing portion comprising an electrically conductive polymer having a positive temperature coefficient of resistivity which increases with temperature sufficient to result in a switching temperature. Said Watkins' patent also teaches use of electricity with a mechanical damage (chafing) sensing portion comprised of a strip disposed in the sheath in a mechanical damage sensing pattern which like said Born's patent becomes damaged or open upon mechanical damage of the sheath before the bundle of conductors are damaged. Watkin's Watkins' patent does not teach a means to perform detection of mechanical damage without use of an electrically conductive sensor material. The present invention overcomes limitations of use of electrical signals by both Watkins' patent and Born's U.S. Pat. No. 6,265,880 by teaching use of measuring change in sensor parameters without the need for end-to-end electrical connectivity. Removing the use of electrical circuits along the conduit is important because electrified polymers or wires can be a safety concern, especially in fire or explosion prone situations that could be caused by electrical signals.

[0016] Currently nothing is in wide use to detect, measure and diagnose onset of damage by simultaneous stressors. Currently nothing is in wide use detect and diagnose damage to conduits with mixed conductors such as electrical power, electrical signal, and optical signal conductors in a single bundle. Use of uncontained electrical signals is often dangerous and hazardous especially when conduits carry flammable or explosive matter, yet currently nothing is in wide use that enables detection of chafing or other damage by non-electrical means. Currently nothing is in wide use that diagnoses the likely stressor, or estimates the likely risk and progress of damage and future damage, or predicts the remaining useful life of a conduit. Currently nothing is in wide use that operates in-situ, on or in the conduit, in a timely fashion to warn and possibly pre-empt catastrophic damage that would otherwise occur.

[0017] Thus there exists a need for an apparatus to detect and identify multiple types of stressors, to quickly measure and interpret multiple types of damage including but not limited to mechanical damage (chafing), all prior to any damage to the internal structure of a conduit or to systems in the vicinity of the conduit. Further there exists a need for a method to combine and fuse information of type and amount of damage with identity of stressors and rate of damage to estimate in a timely fashion the risks of future damage. Further there exists a need for a means to mark multiple points of damage to aid in repair and remediation.

[0018 currently amended] Prior art disclose techniques with real time signal processing to detect intermittent arcing to ground, series arcs and parallel arcs in electrical wiring due to brief wiring shorts. Fleege et al, U.S. Pat. No. 6,242,993 and Haun et al U.S. Pat. No. 6,246,556 use an electrical circuit and signal processing algorithms as part of an "arc fault detecting electrical circuit breaker" to identify arcing faults but cannot locate the place where the arc fault occur. Baldwin et al U.S. Pat. No. 6,249,230 discloses a ground fault detection system and ground fault detector to identify, but not locate the place of, ground faults. These patents dealing with arc and ground faults have limitation because they do not assist detection before the problem occurs and does not assist repairmen in locating the place of where the problem occurs in order to correct the situation and any damage caused. The present invention overcomes limitations of the said arc and ground fault circuit breakers for three reasons. First, the present invention detects conditions prior to when faults occur. Second, the present invention does not require signal processing algorithms, signal digitizer or signal processor to accomplish detecting intermittent faults by using sensed evidence of damage to the sensitized strands at the point of the fault. Third, the location of the intermittent fault can be determined by the marking or by other means such as reflectometry on a damaged strand capable of supporting electromagnetic waves, or measurement of the amount of light contained in the damaged strand of a fluorescent-doped fiber compared to baseline previously measured level of light in the fiber before damage.

[0019] For short exposed distances, some emerging methods and apparatus provide inspection with automated measuring instruments employing means such as digital processing of images made with ionizing radiation, ultrasound, heat, and radar presented at the 2000 Aging Aircraft Symposium in St. Louis Mo., referenced as non-patent document #6. Such methods have limitations due to the subjective nature of reading the images, distance from the conduit, and masking caused by structural members and clamps attached to conduits. Such methods require removing such impediments, focusing on and changing proximity to the impediments, or other intrusive means, and this action can lead to damage where none existed before. More importantly the procedure to detect tiny yet important damage in images other than made by x-ray is invasive requiring rotation to obtain 360-degree inspection. When the size of the conductors are smaller than 16 gage such invasive practice is well known to cause damage by twisting and disturbing the conduits, especially when the conduits are embrittled with age. The present invention overcomes said limitations by operating at the surface of the conduit, providing direct evidence.

[0020] It is a limitation when prior art such as Hiller U.S. Pat. No. 5,218,307 and Miskimins U.S. Pat. No. 6,230,109 that require manual intervention when inspecting electrical and conduits of hazardous materials for defects and failures. The present invention overcomes this limitation by being laid on or in the conduit

before damage occurs and has built in interface to automated remote inspection techniques such as reflectometry, wireless couplings and end-to-end tests.

[Newly Added] Born, et al U.S. Patent No. 6,275,050 teaches use of a harmonic analysis to detect corrosion in metal junctions. Use of harmonic analysis as described by Born requires using at least one electrical signal. The present invention overcomes limitations of said Bond's patent teaching by not requiring use of any electrically conductive sensor material. Removing the use of electrical conductive sensors and thus electrical signals for inspection are important because electricity can be a safety concern, especially in fire or explosion prone situations that could be caused by electrical signals. The present invention overcomes limitations of said Bond's patent teaching of end-to-end measurement of light transmitted using a fiber optic cable by a method that operates without requiring end-to-end measurement.

[Newly added] Khuri-Yakub's U.S. Patent No. 5,271,274 (1993) teaches use of acoustic waves through a film on a substrate, with processing of the output signal to give a thickness value. Khuri-Yakub's patent does not teach use of measurement of optical phenomena such as amount of luminescence. The present invention does not use and overcomes limitations of the said Khuri-Yakub's patent by teaching use of measurement of optical phenomena. The present invention eliminates the need for acoustic processing thus reducing cost and weight for an acoustic processor.

[Newly Added] Morris, Jr., et al, U.S. Patent No. 6,512,444 teaches use of a fault sensing wire that utilizes one or more sensor strips which provide an electrical impedance change when heated. Morris's patent does not teach a means for fault sensing using measuring optical properties. Morris's patent does not teach a means for locating the point of the fault. The present invention overcomes limitations of the said Morris's patent by using light parameter measurement. The present invention eliminates use of electricity which can be a safety hazard; and simplifies the design, which reduces cost and weight and potentially reduces the time for installation. The present invention improves over Morris' methods by substituting measurement of luminescence, fluorescence or other optical phenomena for electrical impedance measurement which would eliminate the use of electrical measurement which can be a safety concern, especially in a fire or explosion prone environment. The present invention further overcomes a limitation of Morris's patent requiring a microcontroller because the present invention also can be embodied without the need for a microcontroller by using direct measurement or analog processing. Eliminating the need for Morris's microcontroller and programming thereof which can result in significant cost savings which is important to the end user.

[Newly Added] Johnson's U.S. Patent No. 5,712,934 discloses an optical sensor comprising a light source, light detector and signal generator and an optical fiber extending between the light source and the detector. Said Johnson's patent does not teach use of induced optical phenomena such as by adding a light-emitting doping in the fiber or its cladding to create enhanced light to perform detection of chemical, mechanical or other damage; nor does Johnson teach the use of a single ended measurement device with a light source and a light detector. The present invention overcomes the need for Johnson's end-to-end measurement of light by using the innovation of measuring change in the amount of lumenscent flux caused by a single ended test, such as ultraviolet rays focused on a the open end of a strand doped with a material that fluoresces under ultraviolet rays.

[Newly Added] De Angelis's U.S. patent [6,392,551] teaches a synthetic fiber cable made with a bundle of load bearing synthetic material fibers and at least one electrically conductive temperature sensor element extending the a length of the cable. The temperature sensor element forms, in dependence on the temperature a conductive connection over the length of the cable, which connection is constantly monitored by a measurement circuit. The present invention improves on said De Angelis's patent by not requiring an electrically conductive element which can be a safety concern especially in a fire or explosion prone environment. Further, the present invention improves on said De Angelis's patent by using a very thin light conducting polymer strand which saves weight over metal strands, weight being a significant advantage for some end uses.

[Newly Added] May's U.S. Patent No. 6,286,557 discloses a sheath having an electrically conductive portion extending from an inner surface to an outer surface. May's patent does not teach how to create a sheath that uses measurement of parameters of Optical Phenomena. The present invention overcomes limitations of the said May's patent by using measurement of Optical Phenomena parameters. The present invention improves on said May's patent because it eliminates the need for electrically end-to-end conductive sensors by introducing use of micro-optical fibers, thus saving weight which can be a significant advantage for some end uses.

[Newly Added] Runner's U.S. Patent No. 5,245,293 describes a method and apparatus for detecting changes in structural strength of a bonding joint using measurement of dielectric properties such as electrical resistance and capacitance. Runner's patent does not teach how to use measurement of optical parameters for detecting changes in structural strength of a bonding joint. The present invention

overcomes limitations of the said Runner's patent by using measurement of optical parameters. The present invention improves on said Runner's patent by substituting single-ended measurement with light for end-to-end electrical measurement which would eliminate the use of electrical measurement of dielectric properties which can be a safety hazard especially in fire or explosion prone environments.

[Newly Added] The disclosures of U.S. Patent No. 6,937,944 , and continuing US patent 6,868,357 by Furse teach detecting damage to a metal conductor by use of a processor which performs frequency domain Fast Fourier Transforms of high frequency electrical signals. The present invention, in the preferred embodiment, improves on Furse by eliminating the need for a high radio frequency signal generator and the electrical signals it creates which can be a safety concern thereby reducing cost and weight and potentially reducing the time for installation.

OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

Original paragraphs [0021] to [0026] and paragraphs [0028] to [0045] are unchanged.

[0021] This invention has the objective to enhance the safety, performance, reliability and longevity of systems that utilize conduits by sensing causes of damage and evidence of deterioration of components. Conduits in this context include, but are not limited to, electrical conductors, optical conductors, harnesses assembled from a multiplicity of combinations of electrical or optical conductors, pipelines for transporting liquids and gases, hydraulic and fuel lines, heating cores and tapes, aqueducts and sewers. Components of said conduits in this context include, but are no means limited to, the supports, cladding, insulation, junctions, electronics and conductors that embody said conduit and the media transported by the conduit. Causes in this context include, but are not limited to, chemicals, mechanical stress, erosion, corrosion, radiation, wetness, oxidation, reduction, electricity, contaminants, the media transported, processes used in manufacturing and installation, and actions of persons that install, inspect, repair and maintain the said conduits.

[0022] Therefore, one object of the present invention is to combine detection of onset of damage by a wide variety of stressors, and perform diagnosis and prognosis of damage to a conduit before damage to the conduit occurs.

[0023] Another object is to provide a method to deduct the identity of active stressors.

[0024] Another object is to provide a means to mark places where damage has occurred and coincidentally mark a place on the stressor as well.

[0025] Another object is to provide a means to diagnose damage, to predict future damage, and to prognose risk of conduit failure and system failure.

[0026] Another object is to provide a means to sense and locate damage that does not depend on electricity to excite sensor material or read the sensor.

[0027 currently amended] A final object is to provide a means and method that operates on or in the conduit, in a timely ~~fashion~~ fashion to warn of damage in progress and possibly pre-empt catastrophic damage that would otherwise occur.

[0028] Accordingly, besides the objects and advantages described above paragraphs several objects and advantages of the present invention are:

[0029] (a) to provide a mechanism and a means for unattended surveillance and real time inspection of conduits;

[0030] (b) to mark the points of damage so as to facilitate remedial action;

[0031] (c) to provide a means to be pro-active by enabling and providing for early detection, identification, and location of external and internal stressors that left unattended will lead to damage of components of the conduit disrupting the system the conduit services.

[0032] Patent searches in preparation of this application have not found prior art that provides a means for enabling real time automated probabilistic identification of the cause. Said searches also have not found prior art that provides a means for automatically and in real time marking of surface at points damage as a means for assisting in remediation and repair thereof. Said searches have not found prior art that utilize combinations of coated, hollow, filled, doped fibers and otherwise sensitized strands as a means for detecting and identifying stressors or detecting and locating damage to the conduit insulation and by implication the conductor therein.

[0033] There is an important and significant advantage in using strands of sensitized medium, and in particular strands that detect damage without the use of electrical excitation or interrogation. Individually, the purpose of the sensitized strands constructed in the manner of the present invention detect and provide data on damage and condition s that could lead to damage, such as ingress of fluids.

[0034] There is an important and significant advantage in having a way to mark points of damage to the strands by the stressors, especially as an aid to repair persons and inspectors. Having a marker dye in the core of each strand, or a marker substance that disperses on damage will release a mark at the location of chafe, laceration, flame or melting heat. Reflectometry and other measurement methods would also locate the place of corrosion, oxidizing due to heat and chafing, etc.

[0035] There are important and significant advantages to employing the invention such as the ability to determine that damage to the sensitized media is taking place that infers or current damage to the insulation and eventually damage to the conducting core. In the case of electrical conduits, or conduits of dangerous chemicals, such damage detected early could mean the difference between life and death. As a minimum the invention has the advantage to implement condition based maintenance which is a procedure of choice in maintaining important systems such as pipelines, conduits, electrical systems, communication systems, data systems and other uses of conduits. In any event, there is the advantage of having the ability to accurately detect, locate and infer the presence of the damaging stressors that will be of use to the inspector or repair person. This will be of particular advantage to inspectors and maintainers when the system of conduits is not easily inspected, perhaps hidden inside a wall, buried underground, in space systems, aircraft and undersea. The advantages are not limited to situations involving the conductive core and extend to the insulation material and other protection devices. An example of such an advantage is found in aircraft wiring systems where insulation is made from aromatic polyimide called Kapton which is known to explode and cause fires when the insulation degrades over time to form carbide molecules which release flammable acetylene gas when wet.

[0036] The significant advantages of the present invention are achieved by use of a microcontroller and signal generators connected to a pattern of a multiplicity of dielectric or otherwise insulated strands each filled, coated, clad or doped with at least one substance specific to a class of stressors so that when said strands are added to or are overlaid onto conduits overcome shortcomings in the prior art. The advantages are achieved by placing said pattern of strands along and around the surface of the conduit. The following list other significant advantages over sundry prior art.

[0037] It is an advantage that the present invention can be used without disconnecting the conduit it inspects.

[0038] It is an advantage that the present invention can be constructed with an integral microcontroller for real time in-situ sensitized medium and sensor management, data processing, and communications

[0039] It is an advantage of the present invention that it can be embodied in a manner using optically transparent fibers inspected by beams of light, whether collimated or not collimated, eliminating the need for electricity or electrification as a means of test.

[0040] It is an advantage of the present invention that it can be so constructed in other embodiments without a microcontroller and signal generators in a manner that facilitates attachment of the microcontroller or other suitable processor, signal generators and ancillary electronics during manual inspections without disassembly of the conduit.

[0041] It is an advantage of the present invention that it provides a means to locate points of stress damage by incorporating at least one strand filled or coated with a marking material.

[0042] It is an advantage of the present invention that it can be configured within the surface of a conduit or it can be placed on or can be sleeved over the conduit surfaces. The present invention thus enhances and protects the existing insulating and protecting material while providing enhancements to current visual inspection techniques and also to inspection using non-visual measurement systems during operations, inspections, tests, and repairs. When embodied in or added to an interconnection system, system of conduits or pipeline, the invention provides a means for ready and accurate determination of the presence, cause, location, degree of stress and degree of damage by a variety of commercially available fibers, measurement devices and instruments.

[0043] The present invention has the advantage to provide inspectors with a means to remotely locate and measure stressors and assess damage by stressors in accessible and inaccessible areas.

[0044] The present invention has the ability to detect onset of damage to the insulator and its protective coating, if any. This is a definite advantage over finding after the fact an electrical fault in the conduit.

[0045] It is an advantage of the present invention that safety risks are avoided because the present invention enables use of light, sound, microwaves, pressure and other non-electrical means to sense, locate and determine causes of damage avoiding the safety risks inherent in using electricity.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Please replace this entire section with the paragraphs that follow:

[0046] Briefly stated, the present invention is a system that provides a mechanism and a method to detect multiple forms of damage to a conduit and perform diagnosis, prognosis related to condition and remaining useful life of said conduit, thereby reducing the chance of failure of any system that would be damaged or whose function would be impaired by damage to the conduit. Such a system could carry electrical power, optical or electromechanical signals, fuel or other fluids, may be hydraulic or pneumatic, or may carry solids such as particles.

Throughout this application "sensor" is synonymous with "sensitized strand". Throughout this application there are terms which relate to measurement of natural phenomena that are known to be caused or induced by a number of factors including photons, heat, chemical reactions, fractures, ionizing radiation, and electricity. In particular, the present invention focuses on optical phenomena which fall into two general categories. The first category is rays of light or flux generated through excitation by photons, mechanical, or chemical means resulting in phenomena widely known as phosphorescence, luminescence, and incandescence. The second category is distortion or blockage, or amplification, or other change to rays of light caused by mechanical means such filtering, splitting, polarization, refraction, reflection and absorption of rays of light. Optical phenomena in the context of the present patent include:

Incandescence: light emission due to temperature (e.g. light bulbs).

Luminescence (Scintillation): light emission due to causes other than temperature. These causes could be electromagnetic radiation, electric fields, chemical reactions, bombardment by sub-atomic particles, or mechanical action. If the sub-atomic particle is an electron, it is called cathodeluminescence. If the mechanical action is breakage or shattering, it is called triboluminescence. If one form of luminescence induces another, it is called "luminescence luminescence".

Fluorescence: luminescence that ceases within ten (10) nanoseconds after the stimulus has ceased.

Phosphorescence: luminescence that continues for more than ten (10) nanoseconds after the stimulus has ceased.

The amount of luminosity and intensity of flux at a measuring point are affected by change of distance from the source of light. The constituent spectra of flux is changed by a prism, optical filtering and mixing with other light sources. The amount of reflected flux can be altered by changes in reflectance such as caused by polishing, etching or oxidation of reflecting surfaces. The amount of luminosity and intensity of flux can be altered by physical means such as bends in an optical fiber that cause light to travel in a longer path; tension stretching a Moire' fringe; compression limiting an optical orifice; a change in position or thickness of a lens. The amount of luminosity and intensity can also be altered by thermal or chemical changes that result a change in transmissivity or refractance. These factors are only meant as examples of common knowledge known to persons who utilize sensors.

Measurements of optical parameters include taking readings of wavelength frequency (Hertz), wavelength (Angstroms), power (Watts), and intensity (lumens). All photometric concepts are based on the concept of a standard measure called a "candle". The ratio of the candle power of a source to its area is called the luminance of the source. The power of the luminance at a particular frequency or band of frequencies can be measured by several common and widely known techniques. Measurement techniques can be single-ended measuring reflected, refracted, defused or induced light as used in telescopes and light meters; or end-to-end with a calibrated source at one end and a calibrated receiver at another. One common and widely known technique is to use a photoresistor or photodetector which are semiconductor devices that convert light energy into a voltage or current. The output voltage or current from the photodetector device is amplified, integrated, averaged, digitized and otherwise manipulated to provide the measurement parameter.

[0047 currently amended] The present invention is comprised of a monitoring device constructed with at least one microcontroller and at least one signal generator connector connected optically or electrically, mechanically to a multiplicity of strands of sensitized media placed on, into, or woven as a sheath substantially surrounding, a conduit and that when attached to, sleeved over, or embedded into said conduit provides a means whereby to detect, locate, and reason the existence, cause and degree of stress or damage to the sensitized medium themselves and by programs and algorithms in the microcontroller or other computer to sense, detect, locate and reason risk of damage of the conduit to which the sheath is attached thereby reducing the chance of failure of any system which would be damaged or whose function would be impaired or degraded by damage to the conduit. .

[0048] Throughout this application the term strands mean elongated forms of substances such as strips, fibers, tubes, filaments of diverse materials and dimensions with excitable strands in this context are those strands that can carry signals. Non-excitable strands in this context are strands that are not intended or not conditioned to carry signals and serve another purpose like a marker strand and said strands can be

entirely selected of optical, electrically opaque medium sensitized with coatings, claddings, and non-metallic materials so as to eliminate any possibility of electrification of the strands.

[0049 currently amended] Damage caused by external stressors including, but not limited to, corrosive chemicals, heat, structures, and maintenance actions is detected by wrapping the conduit with a set of strands of sensitized medium such as treated, clad, or coated hollow or solid fibers. The sensing elements are positioned so that damage caused by a stressor breaks, erodes, corrodes, punctures or breaks one or more of the sensing elements. Measuring the end to end integrity of still measurable sensing elements or performing other tests on them determines whether each has failed, thereby indicating that the conduit's integrity integrity will be ~~eompromised~~ compromised unless remedial action is taken.

[0050 currently amended] According to one embodiment of the invention, a method for detecting damage of a conduit comprises steps of placing adjacent the conduit surface an effective length of a pattern of sensitized medium being located so that a stressor cannot damage the conduit without substantially damaging a strand of sensitized medium; determining and storing ~~baseline~~ characteristics of the installed apparatus; performing measurements during operation in a periodic or continuous fashion on the sensitized medium; analyzing the measurements; comparing the measurements against the stored ~~baseline~~ characteristic measurements; determining damage by examining the integrity of the sensitized medium or other processing; deducing the likely identity of the stressors; diagnosing the meaning of the damage with respect to the conduit; predicting the degree and intensity of the expected damage to the conduit, prognosing the remaining useful life of the conduit without remediation; updating the algorithms and parameters; taking any programmed actions such as if isolating damaged stressors, sensitized medium; and as programmed messaging the status of damage, integrity and remaining useful life for awareness by the operators of the system.

[0051] In its current status of development, the technology of the present invention is being first manufactured for aircraft wiring systems with flight-testing in 2002. A major advantage of the present invention is that it has a three-tier hierarchy of a central processor linked to local processors called sector managers and processors in the apparatus attached to the conduits. This hierarchy is implemented utilizing advanced artificial intelligence algorithms for pattern recognition, machine learning and other techniques to use probability and statistics for highly accurate diagnostics and prognostics. The current implementation incorporates mechanisms and algorithms for artificial intelligence to learn causal factors, and learn the effects of damage from experience dealing with past instances of damage and repair.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS (page 13)

Please replace the paragraphs of this section with the following paragraphs:

[0052 currently amended] The novel aspects of this invention are set forth with particularity in the appended claims.

The invention itself, together with further objects and advantages thereof may be more readily comprehended by reference to the following detailed description of presently preferred embodiments of the invention, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings drawing, in which[[:] according to the teaching of this patent, a single-ended optical measurement of will detect a decrease of flux or a increase of flux due to the amount of foreshortening of the strand by a cut through or break; or because of ingress of rays of light into the affected when the interior of the sensitized strand is exposed but the strand is not foreshortened.

[0053 currently amended] FIG. 1 is a diagrammatic view of the technique of the invention and shows how damage to one or more strands of sensitized media, each coated with an optically opaque substance, employed according to the invention provide the basis not only for accurately locating the place of damage but also provides evidence for reasoning the probable cause of damage. This can be extended by selecting sensitized media constructed in accordance with the invention that are individually or severally affected by stressors. In practice the sensitized media will be individually selected based on the specific application and operation environment of the conduit.

[0054 currently amended] FIG. 1A shows diagrammatically the concept of undamaged strands embodied in the manner of the present invention. The figure shows by example one glass strand, one strand coated with [[of]] noble metal, one strand coated with a [[of]] base metal and one strand with a core that is made of a substance that fluoresces in ultraviolet light, and ~~a hollow core containing a dye that also fluoresces in ultraviolet light~~. Again, ~~These~~ these sensitized media will be individually selected based on the specific application and ~~operation operational~~ environment of the conduit. The four medium used throughout FIGS. 1A through 1E are for example only.

[0055 currently amended] FIG. 1B shows diagrammatically the damage to the sensitized strands caused by a substance that is less hard than glass, because the glass is unaffected, but harder than the base metal, noble metal and substance of the marker strand. The affected marker strand indicates the location of the damage by the debris ~~and spread of dye~~ at the location of damage which is very near the damage to the others. _

[0056 currently amended] FIG. 1C shows diagrammatically the damage across all four strands, which indicates that the damage likely caused by incision or slicing by a substance harder than glass. Again, the change evidenced by the affected marker strand indicates the location of the damage. ~~by the presence of debris and the spread of the dye.~~

[0057] FIG. 1D shows damage to the marking indicator strand only, which indicates the damage is likely caused by certain solvents that are not strong enough to affect the base metals, noble metals or glass but do dissolve the coating of the said marker strand. Collateral information about the composition of said marker strand would provide even more understanding of the cause of damage.

[0058] FIG. 1E shows damage to only the base metal, indicating that the stressor is probably a corrosive because no other strand was affected and the noble metal is intact. The marker strand is unaffected, however a marker substance could have been included in the composition of the base metal, or if a hollow strand filled with marker dye were utilized, a mark would be released.

[0059 currently amended] FIG. 2A is a diagrammatic view of the pattern of strands of sensitized sensitized media formed on or in a sleeve or tube that can be slid in place over the insulated conduit or bundle of insulated conduits in accordance with this invention. The said sleeve or tube could be slit on the diagonal between any two strands of sensitized media can be easily wrapped around a conduit. [[;]]

[0060] FIG. 2B is a diagrammatic view of the pattern of strands of sensitized media formed, embossed, or otherwise placed in largely parallel fashion on a tape that is wrapped onto the insulated conduit or bundle of insulated conduits in accordance with this invention. Three points of attachment are shown along the insulation, and conductor. _

[0061] FIG. 2C is a diagrammatic view of the pattern of strands of sensitized media embossed, extruded, or otherwise placed in a co-linear fashion onto the insulation protecting a conduit in accordance with this invention. This could be split horizontally between any two sensitized to be easily wrapped around a conduit. _

[0062] FIG. 3 is a diagrammatic view of a coupling assembly containing a microcontroller with signal generators connected to discrete sensors and to strands of a pattern of sensitized media attached at points to the coupling for the purpose of detecting, locating, and determining the cause, extent and location of damage. The figure assumes a self-contained power source or attachment of the microcontroller to a power conductor.

[0063] FIG. 4 is a diagrammatic view of a branched insulated conduit tree having outlying sections that when used with the invention can be automatically inspected to measure, locate, reason, and identify the cause and extent of damage in accordance with the invention.

[0064 currently amended] FIG. 5 is a diagrammatic view of embodiment 2 showing a flat, ribbonized, wiring harness with discrete sensors, sensitized media wound and woven in a mesh around its length terminated with a coupling containing the microcontroller, signal generators and other electronics. The figure assumes a self-contained power source or attachment of the microcontroller to a power conductor.

Other comments about FIG. 1, FIG. 2, and FIG. 3 apply to this figure as well.

[0065 currently amended] FIG. 6 is diagrammatic view of an alternative embodiment 3 similar to FIG. 5 showing one coupling serving two ribbonized strands with interwoven strands of sensitized medium. Other comments about FIG. 1, FIG. 2, FIG. 3 and FIG. 5 apply to this figure as well.

[0066 currently amended] Each figure is diagrammatic to the extent that the inner insulated core element [1], insulation protecting the core [2] and sensitized media [3], [4] and [5] are shown as each having no particular material, essentially no thickness, no particular separation distance between materials, and no particular predefined pattern. However, the material, thickness of the said sensitized media and pattern can be selected to provide calibration of the degree of ingress of the damage. For example, a thicker aluminum or corrodible metallic element will withstand more corrosion than a thinner element of the same width and material. For example, a tight pattern of millimeter size elements will reduce chance for not detecting millimeter size damage. FIG. 2B, FIG. 2C, FIG. 3, FIG. 5 and FIG. 6 have diagrammatic points [6] for attaching connections [7] from the signal generators leads [8] and to the coupling [15] is not representative of any particular configuration. Each figure is also diagrammatic with respect to other symbols that represent interconnections [7], signal generators [8], test signals [9][10][11], damage[12], and microcontroller instrument [13] as a part of the coupling [15]. The supporting surfaces and their materials [16][17] [18] have no particular description except as to be not causing cross-talk or other confounding situations. The discrete sensors [19] have no particular sensory capability other than being suitable for use with the microcontroller instrument [13]. Similarly, the debris or leakage [14] has no particular attribute other than having at least one property useful in locating points of damage[12]. The types of sensitized strands [20] [21] [22] [23] are only representative of those compatible with single-ended measurement. Finally, the symbol used for a spool [24] is only for illustrative of a means to apply strands on a supporting medium.

Reference Numerals in Drawings

Please replace the list of reference numerals used in drawings with the following amended list.

- [1] core conduit to be protected from damage
- [2] insulation protecting the core [1]
- [3] sensitized media 1
- [4] sensitized media 2
- [5] sensitized media 3
- [6] point of attachment ~~for measurement instrument~~
- [7] interconnections ~~from point of attachment~~
- [8] signal generator
- [9] signal applied to material sensitized media 1
- [10] signal applied to material sensitized media 2
- [11] signal applied to material sensitized media 3
- [12] damage
- [13] microcontroller
- [14] insulating material debris or leakage
- [15] coupling
- [16] surface of sleeve supporting sensitized media
- [17] surface tape supporting sensitized media
- [18] supporting surface
- [19] discrete (micro) sensors
- [20] strand with core doped with fluorescent chemical and plated with base metal
- [21] strand, with core doped with fluorescent chemical and plated with noble metal
- [22] strand of solid glass
- [23] marker strand
- [24] spool

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Please replace with the following paragraphs

[0086] In order to achieve the objectives of the above mentioned, the present invention provides as system made up of a method and an apparatus, the apparatus comprising:

[0087] a multiplicity of heterogeneous discrete strands of material, each naturally sensitive, or specifically made to be sensitive to stressors or the damage caused thereby by coating, cladding, or doping or other means with at least one media substance specific to a class of anticipated stressor or anticipated damage caused by stressors; and,

[0088] a dielectric substrate, braided matrix, mesh, substance or surface on which to form, overlay, weave, or attach said strands in a measurable pattern; and,

[0089] at least one electronic processing device of type called a microcontroller, or an interface to another suitable processor with ability to digitize, process, and perform prestored algorithms of calculus and logic, interface with microsensors and the said strands; and

[0090] a multiplicity of sensors for the purpose of collection of data on diverse variables anticipated in the domain of the conduit; and

[0091] a multiplicity of signal generators, or a multiplexed signal generator at least sufficient for the purpose of exciting the number of strands that are able be excited to obtain data on health, status, condition, and damage to the said strands.

[0092] Signal generators in this context are electronic, pneumatic, optical, audio or other signals needed to extract data from excitable strands.

[0093] Sensors in this context devices that serve a purpose to provide data on environmental, internal, physics, etc. and may be located at a distance communicating by wired or wireless means to the microcontrollers.

[0094] The said multiplicity of heterogeneous sensitized strands, heterogeneous discrete sensors and microcontrollers serve as a means for sensing, detecting, locating, measuring and messaging in real time about deterioration and damage to sensitized medium, conduits and threats thereto.

[0095] In accordance with the present invention the strands of sensitized medium are sensitized so as to detect and differentiate causes of damage to a conduit and components thereof or damage occurring in the conduit due to internal factors.

[0096] According to conventional design practices, the microcontroller can be constructed in an electrically isolated package and interfaced to only optically conductive sensitized strands using optical decoupling such that light rather than electricity is used to extract data from the strands.

[0097 currently amended] The apparatus of the present invention provides a means to obtain, store baseline and learn from data; the means to learn and fuse data to probabilistically assess causal factors of damage; the means to quantify the state of deterioration and damage that has occurred; the means to assess the risk that a situation exists that likely will soon cause deterioration or damage to happen; and the means to formulate and communicate messages about the state of deterioration, damage, risks of damage and causal factors.

[0098] In accordance with the present invention the apparatus is constructed as a layer, sleeve or tape made a multiplicity of said strands of media coated, doped, and otherwise sensitized to anticipated conditions within and external to said conduits, then adding the constructed apparatus as an applique, sheathing, weaving or winding to the outer or inner surface of the conduit.

[0099] In accordance with the present invention ancillary electronics that are not an integral part of the apparatus such as personal computers, signal conditioners, used for instruments not included in the apparatus should be selected so as to be able to be readily interfaced to the apparatus.

[0100] In accordance with the present invention, the microcontroller and other electronics should be packaged with foresight to prevent damage to itself or other entities.

[0101] In accordance with the present invention the substrate, mesh, or surface on which to form, overlay, or attach the strands is selected of suitably inert insulating material.

[0102] In accordance with the present invention, when used in communication with a commercially available computer, the data, causal inferences, probabilities and messages generated by the microcontroller of the present invention can be used by the computer to probabilistically predict future local, system and end effects of faults and failures as well as remedial actions.

[0102a newly added] In accordance with the present invention, the sensitized medium can be made up of piecewise pieces of heterogenous medium placed layered, side-by-side or end-to-end; each piece, when stimulated, either emitting optical phenomena, or exciting optical phenomena of the sensor or releasing optical phenomena from the sensor; and could be of any size with respect to said supporting surface.
Further, the individual patterns can be electrically conductive as long as they do not introduce unintended side effects or electrical conductivity end-to-end for the length of the sensor.

PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Please replace this entire section with the paragraphs that follow.

[0103] The preferred embodiment involves connecting a battery, power scavenging capacitor, solar cell array, or other suitable source of power, a wireless commercially available microcontroller such as a Sentient.TM. microcontroller, which in turn is connected to a multiplicity of selected commercially available discrete sensors, and a multiplicity of commercially available sensitized strands coated, doped, or clad with specific sensor properties affixed in a largely parallel pattern on a suitable insulating substrate such as a fluoropolymer like EFTE, EFTE-CTFE, FEP, and PFA or mylar or polyimide. The apparatus is either directly attached to a conduit, woven in an insulated mesh, or woven among conductor strands or on an insulating substrate that is subsequently affixed to a conductor or conduit. In service the preferred embodiment is linked by wire or wirelessly to a remote computer such as a commercially available palm, laptop, or desktop model.

[0104] The said microcontroller provides the means to collect and process data obtained from the said strands and from said discrete sensors with algorithms to detect and probabilistically determine extent of damage as well as predict future damage and the progression of effects of failures on the system served by the conduit.

[0105] The said discrete sensors provide the means to sense local configuration, usage, threat and environmental data. Types of said discrete sensors include, but are not limited to, devices for measuring humidity and temperature and other evidence such as odors from combustion byproducts. The said discrete sensors provide the means to detect deterioration and damage as well as detect factors that would affect the conduit and the service it provides.

[0106] The said multiplicity of strands are selected for each application primarily as a means to provide data about deterioration, damage, or causal factors; and secondarily to provide a means to indicate places where deterioration, damage or threat of damage exists. In a preferred embodiment, all fibers must be nearly of the same diameter, and the strands would be laid out in a measurable pattern that surrounds the conduit such as those shown in the FIG. 1, FIG. 2, FIG. 3, FIG. 5 and FIG. 6. Ideally the pattern strands around the conduit should repeat their pattern in a space of less than one centimeter.

[0107] The said remote computer is selected for the ability to communicate with the said microcontroller or perhaps indirectly with a system computer that communicates with the said microcontroller by wired or wireless means. Collectively, data from the microcontroller is the means to use artificial intelligence algorithms to make an probabilistic identification of the causes of stress; predict the type of damage being wrought; estimate the degree of damage incurred; estimate the remaining useful life before failure occurs

to the conduit. The remote computer provides the means to communicate in real or elapsed time to persons who are at risk, who provide maintenance services, or who otherwise need to be aware of deterioration, damage, or risk thereof to the conduit and the services it provides.

[0108] In the preferred embodiment, the said pattern of a multiplicity of strands is connected with the said microcontroller at least at one end. Situations may arise when a microcontroller is required at another end of the conduit. This can be readily accomplished with a wireless, light emitting, or wired commercial technology such as BlueTooth™. In the preferred embodiment the discrete sensors will be placed for maximum effectiveness and if necessary the sensors could be connected to a commercial wireless technology like BlueTooth™. to enable performing functions such as sensing for end-to-end continuity tests.

[0109 currently amended] Referring now to FIG. 1, which shows a diagrammatic views of how damage to one or more sensitized media provides evidence for determining the cause of damage. For illustration, the sensitized media in FIG. 1[.] comprise a strand of translucent fiber doped with a substance that fluoresces when exposed to ultraviolet, coated with [[a]] an opaque piezoelectric material [23] [[,]]; a strand of optically transparent fiber coated with base metal (e.g. aluminum) [20][[,]]; a strand of optically transparent fiber coated with a noble metal (e.g. gold) [21][[,]]; and a strand of silica fiber coated with a fluorescent polyimide buffer [22]. The four media [20 to 23] used throughout FIG. 1 are for example only. The headings five sub-diagrams in FIG. 1 show how evidence from damage to the sensitized media is readily combined to infer the probable cause of damage. Logic combining the temporal order of damage indicated in a test and type of the conductive elements affected with damage can be used to assess the type, degree, and speed of ingress of damage. For example, discontinuity to one material caused by hydraulic fluid would not affect a metallic surface; and damage due to acid corrosion of a metallic surface would not affect a sensitized media made with a noble metal, a plastic or a polymer. This evidence can be processed with artificial intelligence algorithms such as a Neural Network, Bayesian Belief Network or Boolean Logic truth-table to derive the probable causal factors.

[0109a new] Referring now to FIG. 1A which shows diagrammatically the concept of undamaged strands embodied in the manner of the present invention. The figure shows by example the four types of strands [20], [21], [22], [23]. In practice, these sensitized media will be individually selected based on the specific application and operation environment of the conduit.

[0109b new] Referring now to FIG. 1B which shows diagrammatically the damage caused by a substance that is less hard than silica, because the strand made of silica [22] is unaffected; but harder than the strands plated with metal [21] [20]; and harder than the substance of strand [23]. The debris from strands [22] and [23], when exposed to rays from an ultraviolet (UV) lamp, will fluoresce at the location of damage [12] particularly if there is debris or leakage [14]. Measurement of luminescence with a calibrated UV lamp at one end of the damaged strands forms the basis , by simple mathematics and logic, to diagnose either an incision or chafing along the damaged strand. Since the amount of luminescence is known to be proportional to the length of the strand, measuring the relative amount of luminescence can be used to estimate the point of a broken strand caused by an incision or chafing.

[0109c newly added] FIG. 1C shows diagrammatically the damage across all four sensitized strands [20][21][22][23], which indicates that the damage [12] is probably caused by incision or slicing by a substance harder than glass. Again, the teachings associated with FIG 1C apply.

[0109d new] FIG. 1D shows damage to the polyimide coated strand [23] only, which indicates the damage is likely caused by certain solvents that are not strong enough to affect the strands coated with base metal [20], noble metals [21] or glass [22] but do dissolve the coating of the polyimide coated strand [23]. Collateral information about the composition of said polyimide coated strand [23] would provide even more understanding of the cause of damage. Single-ended measurement will detect increased luminescence caused by ingress of flux of ultraviolet light into the affected sensitized polyimide coated strand [23].

[0109e new] FIG. 1E shows damage to only the sensitized strand coated with base metal [20], indicating that the stressor is probably a corrosive because no other strand was affected and the strand coated with noble metal [21] is intact. According to the methods described in the claims, a single-ended measurement will measure less retained light in the affected sensitized strand [20] than before due to light escaping because of lost ase metal coating; and the amount reduced will indicate the relative measure of corrosion.

[0110 currently amended] Referring now to FIG. 2A, which shows a pattern of heterogeneous sensitized media [3][4][5] laid linearly in parallel fashion as helices with as small a pitch between media as possible, formed on the outer or inner surface [16]. The surface could be a sleeve or tube made of suitable dielectric or other material suitable for the purpose of separating the sensitized strands. The said pattern of

sensitized media could be on the exterior, the interior, or formed as a matrix with the inter-spatial material to form a sleeve or tube. A plurality of sensitized media can be placed on both upper and lower surfaces. The calculation of distance by the sensor instrument algorithm can be used to discern which side or edge of the ribbonized conduits is being damaged. The pattern of sensitized media [3][4][5] can be formed on a sleeve [16] so as to enclose [[a]] a single conduit or a bundle of conduits. If the sleeve [16] is made of shrinkable material it can be slipped and shrunk over the insulation or itself be made of an insulation. The pattern of sensitized media [3][4][5] can be of diverse materials such as optical strands, metal strands, or organic strands formulated to sense or to act as waveguides or transmission lines. The type of signal is specific to the sensitized media and could be electricity, sound, light, radio frequency, or other signal appropriate to the sensitized media. The arrangement of the strands of sensitized media in patterns can be coaxial or at any angle consistent for measurement of the path to damage conduit(s). The patterns can be touching one another if they are surface compatible such as non-metal media surface touching metal surface media.

[0111 currently amended] Referring now to FIG. 2B, which shows diagrammatically a pattern of sensitized media [3][4][5] formed onto a surface [17] of suitable material such as a dielectric, which is placed onto the insulation protecting the core [2] and/or the conduit core [1]. The tape surface could be adhesive or other means such as thermal shrinking could be used as the form of attachment. Points of attachment Attachment points [6] for the leads from the instrument can be positioned if desired anywhere along the said sensitized media. The tape pattern of sensitized media can be applied in a helical fashion as shown if omni-directional coverage is needed.

[0112] Referring now to FIG. 2C which shows diagrammatically an alternative pattern of sensitized media [3][4][5] laid coaxially along a surface [18]. The pattern can be repeated to encircle the insulation for omni-directional coverage. The use of co-linear sensitized media has the advantage that it can be slit to fit over the conduit. The discussion about FIG. 2A applies to this configuration as well.

[0113 currently amended] Referring now to FIG. 3, which shows diagrammatically alternative embodiment number 2, with the microcontroller [13] can be separated from the apparatus yet connected to the arrangement of strands. The microcontroller [13] assembly can be located on a conduit connected to the said conduit, serving both conduits and thereby saving costs such weight, space, and money. FIG. 3 shows a sensored conduit built with discrete sensors [19] and with a pattern of sensitized media [3][4][5] embedded on the inner surface of a sleeve in accordance with this invention is illustrated as applied to an insulation protecting the core [2] surrounding a conduit core [1]. The pattern of different sensitized media [3][4][5] are shown along the length of the insulation in side by side spirals. This preferred embodiment provides initial protection of the plurality of sensitized media so that if ingress of damage due to stressors

occurs the various materials are at risk; and as discontinuity of any sensitized media occurs the spatial location of the damage can be measured by reflectometry, signal strength remaining or other remote means. The cause of the damage can be interpreted by algorithms that take into account possible stressors and the damage inflicted to the sensitized media. A preferred embodiment shows a coupling [15] that contains the microcontroller [[-]]-electronics [13] shown in the offset area inside dashed lines as well as a discrete sensor [19]. The coupling is attached to the individual members of the discrete sensor and to the sensitized media with a suitable attachment point [6]. The method of attachment can be any low impedance connection. The attachment points may be of a form such as detents, clamps, holes, posts, or screws, or in the alternative the coupling may be welded or otherwise coupled or permanently fastened to the sensitized media. The coupling itself, which may be of the so-called BNC type, have an outer shell and a center holding a plurality of conduits. The outer shell of a coupling [15] is connected to one or more of the conductive elements such as the sensitized media [4]. An attachment point [6] provides a convenient way to connect the discrete sensors [19] to the microcontroller [13] instrument and connections [7] from the test signal generators [8]. Note damage to the sensitized media [3] causing a point of the interruption damage [12]. The distance to the damage can be as short as a few millimeters and at least a few meters. The distance can possibly be as long as several miles for laser signals depending on signal loss in the fiber.

[0114 currently amended] Referring now to FIG. 4 which diagrammatically represents a tree of several connected branches of conduits. To check installation or to perform a test for absence of damage, an end-to-end test can be made using a signal of type appropriate for an element sent from a signal generator [8] and carried along conduit connections [7] to the processor microcontroller [13]. Depending on the sensory element, the signal can be of various type such as electricity, light, laser, sound, and high frequency waves. Damage [12] on section (e,f) is detected, located and its cause inferred when erosion, corrosion, breakage or other factor causes at least one sensitized media to change a [[the]] response characteristic such as causing the reflection of the signal to be shorter than before with an abbreviated measured distance to the point of discontinuity caused by damage [12]. In the case of ambiguity caused by the branches, a sensor signal source can be located at another place in the tree to accurately locate the place of damage.

[0115 currently amended] Referring now to FIG. 5, which shows diagrammatically embodiment 2 sensored ribbonized organized mixed electrical and fiber optic conduit built with a discrete sensor [19] and with a pattern of sensitized media [3][4][5] embedded on the inner surface of a sleeve in accordance with this invention is illustrated as applied to an insulation protecting the core [2] surrounding a conduit core [1]. The pattern of different sensitized media [3][4][5] are shown along the length of the insulation.

The statements about FIG. 3 apply. Notice the shape of the coupling housing the electronics shown offset in the dashed space. These electronics could also be attached during inspection if it were not embedded in the coupling [15].

[0116 currently amended] Referring now to FIG. 6, which shows diagrammatically alternative embodiment 3 similar to alternative embodiment 2 shown in FIG. 5 but with the apparatus now serving two sides, thereby achieving a saving of one microprocessor unit and ancillary electronics for the signal generator generation [8] and processing the microcontroller [13].

[0117 currently amended] Other embodiments can utilize a manual readout device such as a commercially available personal computer or palm computer. Testing by automated readout can be instrumented in any of several implementations depending on the particular applications by interfacing with the microcontroller [19] [13] by way of its input/output connectors.

[0118 currently amended] Another embodiment would be to place sensitized strands atop one another so that when each in turn is damaged the depth of damage is determined. Cross-talk caused by separated adjacent conduits will not generally be a problem because measurements will usually be performed serially. Non-interfering patterns such as one for voltage and one for light waves can be laid touching side by side to avoid even a tiny gap that might lead to having an undetected point of damage. Conflicting conducting patterns such as gold and aluminum which both conduct electricity will need spatial clearance or a suitable spacing material to avoid forming junctions, cross-talk or other confounding situations. The pattern of conducting elements can be applied singularly or en masse as an applique embossed on a non-conducting substrate such as polyimide or a fluoropolymer such as EFTE. Or, the pattern of conducting elements can be extruded or embossed directly onto the insulation surface. Whatever the type of pattern (helical, coaxial, wavy, etc.) that is used, all distances to a point of damage are also defined.

[0119 currently amended] A person familiar with use of microcontrollers would understand that in any embodiment, one or more additional couplings [15] with or without a microcontroller [13] and discrete [[micro]] sensors [19] can be attached to the pattern of sensitized media at locations spaced apart from the first coupling [15], so that differential measurements can be taken at the couplings. The additional information from measurements at another point of the branches will accurately resolve any ambiguities caused by a plurality of sensitized media in a branched tree of conduits.

[0120] A person familiar with sensoring would understand that in the case of very long conduits perhaps over 1000 meters, it may be necessary to add additional processors at distanced points, probably at connectors as determined by the range of effectiveness of individual sensors.

[0121] While the current invention is described mostly in connection with a presently preferred embodiment thereof, those skilled in the art will recognize that any modifications and changes may be made therein without departing from the true spirit and scope of the invention, which accordingly is intended to be defined solely by the appended claims. For instance, in most figures three distinct sensor elements are shown, but there could be any number arranged in any order. Any person familiar with performing tests for conductivity and reflectometry will concur that any number of sensitized media laid in patterns of any non-interfering arrangement can be utilized.

[0122] All of the embodiments above offer the following advantages over present techniques. The present invention detects many damages other than chafing caused by many other causes than abrasion or incision. It matters not whether the conduit is operating or not operating. The present invention detects damage due to virtually all and every stressor by selecting sensitized strands specific to each damaging factors of each stressor. The present invention can be implemented to operate from manual to fully automatic.

[0123] Clearly, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. Which embodiment to employ depends on the application. The choice should be left to system engineers and experts in operating the systems to be protected. It should be therefore understood that, within the scope of the inventive concept, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically claimed.

Operation-Preferred Embodiment

[0124] Operation of the invention is accomplished by selecting and procuring or making the sensitized sensor medium appropriate to the environment, damage causing factors, and the conduit; assembling the largely parallel arrangement of said strands onto the support media; adding the points and connections to the electronics (if any), adding appropriate sensors (if any); and authoring algorithms and rules for running in the microcontroller (if any); installing the apparatus onto or into the conduit; performing tests for operability; install the apparatus onto or into the conduit; activate with a suitable power source (if any).

[0125] When forming the sensor medium onto the support medium it is prudent to encircle the segments of the conduit with a tightly spaced helix of sensitized media joined as necessary by couplings that accomplish continuity. In the preferred embodiment, depending on the sensitized media it may be necessary to attach a lead from a measurement instrument and a lead from a signal source to opposite ends of said sensitized media for the purpose of collecting and interpreting changes in data caused by stressors.

[0126] The sensor medium should be in contact with the surface of the conduit. If a heat shrinkable substrate is used, the embodiment is heated appropriately to tightly affix the embodiment to the segments of the interconnection assembly. In operation the sensitized media encasing the segments will be affected by stressors operating on them. End to end tests or tests such as reflectometry can be used to detect damage to any sensitized media able to carry the waveforms. On detection of said damage the computer uses algorithms such as trending, pattern matching, fuzzy logic, distance calculation, logic, inference and data fusion to determine the type, location and cause of the damage as well predict future impacts of the damage if damage is allowed to progress into the protective insulation and eventually the conducting core. Next, the results of the detection, location, and determination of cause are used to initiate or request actions that mitigate or remove the stressor or stressors that are the cause of damage as well as corrective actions to bypass, repair or otherwise deal with the damage. During said actions the damage to the interconnection system is repaired and damaged and sections of the sensitized media used in the embodiment of the invention are replaced or repaired.

Reduction to Practice

[0127] In the course of reducing the invention to practice we acquired and used several commercially solid and hollow coated fiber technologies. We acquired fibers from Polymicro Technologies, Fiberguide Industries, and Lucent Technologies. There are literally hundreds of different commercial fiber products, each with different properties. According to a preferred embodiment of the present patent, we formed a substrate of a commercially available polyimide film. To the said substrate we attached and glued fibers that were of approximately equal diameter in a largely parallel repeated and measureable alignment. The said fibers were a fiber surface-coated with a piezoelectric substance, an aluminum coated fiber, a gold coated fiber, and a silica optical fiber coated with polyimide. We selected the piezoelectric coated fiber for its ability to generate electrical signals during abrasion to indicate evidence rubbing. We selected the fiber coated with aluminum for the purpose to sense and locate damage of corrosion. We selected the fiber gold plated fiber as a control to differentiate chemical corrosion of aluminum from chafing and cut-through laceration. We selected a silica core optical fiber coated with polyimide insulation as a control.

[0128] Next, the film with the attached fibers was wrapped to surround the surface of a conduit consisting of several insulated electrical wires. We recorded the geometry variables for use in accurately measuring the distance from the end to a point of damage.

[0129 currently amended] In a parallel effort, we loaded commercially available software into the remote computer. We used the Matlab.TM. software to process sampled data and test Boolean equations and Netica.TM. software for making probabilistic estimates using a probabilistic calculus called a Bayesian Belief Network. Next, we connected each fiber surface to the digitizing input of the microcontroller circuit and obtained and recorded baseline characteristic measurements.

[0130] We conducted experiments using seeded damage. The experiments were successful in detecting seeded damage. The experiments consisted of salt water for slow corrosion, rubbing with and without fine pumice to simulate erosion causing chafing, knife cuts causing lacerations, and direct flame causing quick oxidation of aluminum and melting of plastics. Sensor data collected by the microcontroller was transmitted to the remote computer. Digitized waveforms from reflectometry were processed with a MatLab.TM. Time Domain Reflectometer simulator program. When a fiber filled with ink was breached the ink leaked out showing the ability to mark the point of damage. We used the Bayesian Belief Network to determine the most probable cause of damage from sensed data.

[0131] We performed tests with a commercially available encapsulated marking substance to mark points of damage caused by lacerations, erosion, corrosion, burning, arcing, and dissolution. A person familiar with the art of using liquid filled fibers would recognize that when breached by a stressor the liquid filled fiber will leak fluid when a pressure differential occurs and that said pressure differentials are especially common in traversing altitudes of aircraft flight regimes.

Conclusion, Ramifications, and Scope

[0132] The information in this patent disclosure discloses the idea, embodiment, operation of the invention in order to support the stated claims. The scope of the claims include use of patterns of diverse and different sensitized media formed, laminated, extruded, glued, taped, on or in materials such as insulation and materials used to construct various types of conduits. The types of sensitized media include, but are not limited to, piezoelectric strands, coated and uncoated strands of electrically conductive materials, coated or uncoated strands of optically conductive materials, soluble conductive strands, strands of or coated with base and noble metals, and materials used in waveguides and transmission lines. The various types of conduits include, but are not limited to, harnesses and cables of electrical and fiber optic systems as well as conduits comprised of pipes and hoses carrying liquids, gases and solids.

[0133] A person familiar in aircraft systems would understand that in the case of aircraft conduits it is reasonable that minimal selection of strands would include those to sense laceration, corrosion, heat and chafing. Individual hollow strands coated with aluminum to detect corrosion, a material with a positive thermal coefficient to detect heat, and piezoelectric material to detect mechanical chafing would suffice.

[0134] A person familiar in the art of forming insulated strands will concur that the said pattern of sensitized media can be extruded on the surface of the insulation or extruded as a layer in the insulation protecting the conduit.

[0135] A person familiar in sensoring would appreciate that the discrete sensors may not be necessary in some alternate embodiments.

[0136] A person familiar in the art of sensitized medium and their arrangement would appreciate that they can be substituted freely with equivalent components to adapt to specific application requirements.

[0137] A person familiar in the art of using microcontrollers would appreciate and agree that various commercial equivalent microcontroller products or even a unique design using discrete components can be substituted freely to adapt to specific application requirements.

[0138 currently amended] A person familiar in the art of chemistry would understand that the marking substances can also be formulated to provide a functionality at extreme temperatures as well a self healing mechanisms to control damage, or prophylactic properties to prevent further damage. Said person would agree that marking substances can be formulated to provide visual reference, such as fluorescing under ultra-violet light, or provide other attributes for detection such as radioactivity, smell, or coloration at the place of damage using means such as instruments, humans, or animals trained to detect the released substance. The said person would agree that the said marking substance can be formulated to provide ability to work at extreme temperatures, have low capillary adhesion, to be eroded by chafing to be a marker powder, and other desired attributes for use in applications.

[0139] A person familiar with design and use of sensors would agree that it matters not whether any fiber is used for multiple purposes such as detecting movement and vibration because such uses are not conflicting. The said person would agree that fibers can be selected to collect evidence of causal factors associated with application specific environments.

[0140] A person familiar in the art of building sensors would understand that the attachment point [6] may be unnecessary as direct coupling may be possible. Also, a person familiar in the art would recognize that the surface and shape of the apparatus can be rectangular, round, or any shape as required by the shape of the conduit.

[0141] A person familiar in the art would understand that for use of a reflectometer a built in signal decoupler would enable determining in which direction the damage occurred. A person familiar in the art would understand that various shapes of the pattern of signal conduits such as parallel wavy lines are equivalent.

[0142] A person familiar in making insulated conduits would understand that the pattern of conducting elements can be embedded or embossed on a non-conducting substrate such as mylar or polyimide. Or, the pattern of conducting elements can be extruded or embossed directly onto the inner insulation surface and then overcoated with insulation material. Several embedded layers can be combined with a surface layer if desired.

[0143] A person familiar in the art of sensors would understand that if an electrically conductive sensitized media was used as a sensor a load resistor or capacitor to a segment of the applique conduit for performing measurements to determine and localize a discontinuity or change in impedance between the two connectors. The couplings [15] could self contain a multiplicity of miniature lasers such as a vertical cavity semiconductor lasers and detection by a light detector perhaps implemented with a directional coupler along with a microcomputer. Similar configurations would use radio frequencies, microwaves, or spectral energy with appropriate detectors.

[0144] A person familiar in the art of sensors would understand that mixed sensitized media can be used and formulated for specific sensory properties such as electrically conductive, optically conductive, chemically sensitive, etc. and that sensitized surfaces can be of diverse properties such as inert, piezoresistive, piezoelectric, semiconductor, chemically soluble, chemically reactive, etc.

[0145] A person familiar in the art of optical materials such as glass or plastic fibers would understand that mixed sensitized media can be used such as optically conductive sensitized media, and that a photo-diode, photo-resistor or photo-capacitor could be used with an selected wavelength photo-emitters to determine and localize a discontinuity or change in optical impedance in the distance of the conduit.

[0146] A person familiar in signal measurement would agree that while it is possible to make measurements on a terminated and active insulated conduit, it is also possible to make measurements on an un-terminated insulated conduit. Said person would also understand that no signal is added or taken from the conduit, which is insulated. However, the accuracy of measurement is greatest when the distance between the measuring instrument (e.g. a reflectometer) is small and the terminating impedance is lowest. It will also be understood measurements can be made over more than one segment with reduced accuracy. This is consistent with the use of reflectometry in testing of multiple segments of conduits in long distance communication systems and long distance electrical lines.

[0147] A person familiar in the art of sensors and sensing would agree that shape of the strands of sensing material can be circular like that of fibers or any manufacturable shape including but not limited to square, trapezoidal, parallelograms, and oval.

[0148] A person familiar in the art of sensors and sensing would agree that the width of the conducting material may not be as important as for electrical signals; and may be quite independent of width of the conducting material for optical and fluorescent fibers especially when evanescent escape is minimal. Further, a person familiar in the art would understand that a decoupler would enable determining is which direction the damage occurred.

[0149] A person familiar in the art of sensors would agree that a pattern of discrete sensors and strands of sensitized media can touch if touching is not a source of confounding information such as caused by a metal to metal short or interference in a light path.

[0150] A person familiar in the art of sensors would agree that a plurality of heterogeneous sensitized media in diverse shapes can be used including but not limited to filaments, ribbons, strips, or deposits and extrusions.

[0151] A person familiar in the art of sensors would agree that the types of sensitized media can be homogeneous or heterogeneous, can be made from differing yet compatible materials, and that a selection of heterogeneous materials (e.g. gold and aluminum) allows use of pattern recognition and

logical inference.

[0152] A person familiar in the art of sensors would agree that damage to the sensitized media that causes significant change in impedance or discontinuity, causes the reflected characteristics to be changed shortened and that the location of the point of damage is calculated by measuring the distance from the source of the pulse as a function of known frequency and known time of the return pulse by using a signal processing algorithm similar in function to a Fast Fourier Transform. If the distance can be in one of several directions a decoupler can be used to limit the pass through of the waveform to a single direction.

[0153] A person familiar in the art of sensors would agree that the foreshortening of a fiber doped with a fluorescing material would reduce lumens contained and reflected to the source.

[0154] A person familiar in the art of fluorescent illumination of doped fibers would agree that the foreshortening of a fiber doped with a fluorescing material would reduce lumens reflected to the source. The location of the point of damage is accomplished by measuring the amount of lumens sensed at the source. If the distance can be in one of several directions a one-way optical grating can be used to limit the pass through of the lumens to a single direction.

[0155] A person familiar in the art of damage prevention would understand that the preferred configuration will result in damage detection before any damage failure of the inner insulation protecting the core.